

PRESS RELEASE

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BALANCED BUDGET AMENDMENT COMMERCIALIZES THE CONSTITUTION

Congressman John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee issued the following statement at today's Subcommittee on the Constitution Hearing on H.J. Res. 22, the "Balanced Budget Amendment":

"The balanced budget amendment was a bad idea when the Republicans included it in the contract with America in 1994, and it is a bad idea today. The last thing we need to do is 'commercialize' the Constitution by inserting into its sacred text an ill-defined, electoral 'promise' to balance the budget.

What the American public wants to see us do is to see their elected officials take responsibility for balancing the budget -- rather than simply taking credit for promising to do so at some point in the distant future.

I for one cannot subscribe to simply enshrining a "new promise" by government that could only be honored by vitiating existing promises in areas of social security and veterans benefits -- or by creative financing which would shift the real economic burdens for cutting the federal deficit onto the backs of the States, cities and towns; only then to be shifted to the American taxpayer.

In the end, the fatal flaw of the proposed constitutional amendment is its failure to respect the American people by avoiding the real work and hard decisions necessarily entailed in truth-in-budgeting. Offered in the place of laying out precisely the path and procedure for eliminating the federal deficit is the gleaming promise to make the hard budget decisions somehow, somewhere and at some later time -- but, in any event, not here, and not now, and surely not in relevant detail.

As members of the Judiciary Committee, we have a particular duty to look critically and specifically at all possible consequences, both intended and unintended, of a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution. The potential consequences of this amendment include substantial budget cuts, and significant changes in the budgetary process itself, the role and powers of the Congress, the President, and the courts in that process, and the division of financial burdens, responsibilities, and control among federal, State and local governments.

Finally, it is indeed ironic -- some might say hypocritical-- for the Majority party to be pushing this proposal now. Need I remind the members that in two short years the Majority has taken us from the unprecedented fiscal discipline and budget surpluses of the Clinton years to a point where we are facing record budget deficits as far as the eye can see. To me it is absolutely shameful to be pushing massive tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent of taxpayers which will cost us trillions of dollars while at the same time seeking a balanced budget amendment. Something doesn't add up."

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